

Gathers Bipartisan Group of Local, State and Federal Officials to Discuss Clean Air Controversy

PHOENIX - U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today convened a bipartisan conference to address the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed disapproval of Maricopa County's plan to meet national air quality standards. If not resolved, the issue could result in the loss or delay of billions of dollars of transportation funding for the region. [Source: [Arizona Republic](#), August 29, 2010]

"We all want clean air and want to meet national air quality standards, but the EPA needs to understand that we live in a desert, and deserts have dust," said Mitchell. "Why would the EPA want to jeopardize funding for environmentally friendly transportation projects like the expansion of light rail in Mesa or the construction of a streetcar in Tempe? If anything, I would think they would want to accelerate these kinds of projects, not short-circuit them. Obviously there was a lot to talk about and I'm glad we had the opportunity to do so today."

Attendees included a broad cross section of stakeholders. In addition to officials from the EPA, the meeting included the executive teams from the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), the State Department of Environmental Quality, Maricopa County Air Quality, the City of Phoenix, as well as Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf, chair of MAG, Mesa Mayor Scott Smith, Chair of MAG's Transportation Policy Committee, and representatives from the offices of Congressman Jeff Flake and Congressman Ed Pastor.

On September 9, 2010, the EPA issued a notice of proposed rulemaking to partially disapprove the Maricopa Association of Government's plan to attain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for particulate matter of ten microns or less (PM-10).

"MAG, Maricopa County, and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality have an impressive track record for improving the quality of our air. We care about the air our residents breathe. That is why we have taken aggressive action to protect public health," said Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf, chair of MAG. "Our plan contains 53 aggressive measures to address dust pollution. It is effective and it is working. A conformity freeze would hurt our economy at a time we can least afford it. Our hope is that this will be a collaborative process and that we will be able to move forward with EPA in a way that will not harm the residents of Arizona."

Mayor Smith, Chair of MAG's Transportation Policy Committee, said, "This federal action is extremely problematic for transportation projects in Maricopa County. I applaud the Congressman's efforts to convene this forum and work toward a solution with EPA. We are all committed to clean air and will continue to work with EPA, but jobs are at stake."

Last week, Mitchell requested an audience with the EPA to give local state and federal officials a chance to voice their concerns before the comment period for the proposed rule closes on October 20th. A copy of Mitchell's letter to the EPA can be found [here](#).

If the EPA takes final action on the proposed rule, and disapproves Maricopa County's plan, a "conformity freeze" could take effect, under which transportation projects in the Phoenix metro area could be halted.

The conference was held at the offices of the Maricopa Association of Governments in downtown Phoenix.

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